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# FOCUS

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The task force currently deployed to South Sudan is made up of 25 units, with 400 service personnel

# Supporting South Sudan

Gary Sullivan discusses how the weather is just one element that the British Army has to overcome in its humanitarian role for the world's newest country.



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Declared independent in 2011, by 2013 a political power struggle had taken the country into civil war. As many as 300,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the war and infant mortality runs at 10%. About three million people have been displaced in a country of 12 million.

The British Army's Engineer Task Force currently deployed to South Sudan is made up of 25 units, with 400 service personnel, including reservists. Leading the Task Force is the Royal Engineers (RE), with additional elements drawn from the Infantry, Medical Corps, Royal Logistic Corps (RLC), REME, Royal Signals and the Royal Military Police. To sustain 400 individuals with food and water is a substantial logistics challenge, even before the mission task resources have to be delivered.

First deployed in 2016, the RE has been serving in Malakal in the north of the country, where the UK troops have carried out significant infrastructure work vital to the UN mission, including camp construction, building drainage systems and perimeter security structures, as well as helicopter landing sites. In Bentiu, they have built a new permanent hospital, providing medical care for the 1800 UN personnel, and clinical training to local medical staff at the Bentiu State Hospital. At Kodok, on the banks of the Nile, the mission is to provide security that would encourage the population to return and reinvigorate the fishing industry that had prospered before the war.

In the rainy season the roads all but disappear and the RE has to rely on aircraft to deliver supplies. To mitigate this single-channel logistics route, the RE is building a port to enable the Nile to become a main supply route. As is so often the case, the construction task was relatively simple; the working environment austere and the logistics, however, proved more than a little challenging.

War-torn, landlocked and with almost no infrastructure, South Sudan is an impoverished country with limited resources. Add to the mix the bureaucracy of the UN, national politics and myriad NGOs competing for logistics lift and you need more than process, you need relationships. The RE had to change the plan several times to adapt to local conditions. In addition to core skills of construction, RE personnel had to become diplomats and ambassadors as they integrated into the UN mission and its many cultural idiosyncrasies.

The complexity of working in a high-threat area cannot be overstated and requires significant team effort, but, as so often, it

is on the shoulders of the logistician that the responsibility for success rests: no supplies, no operation. One such individual was Corporal Sam Sellen, RLC, deployed to work as the sole Movement Controller as part of the Operation Trenton team. He was responsible for planning and executing the movement of multinational forces, and the facilitation of the supply chain, by land, air and sea. Understanding the significant environmental and cultural constraints, he made immediate efforts to integrate into the multinational UN movements team. He quickly developed rapport with the key stakeholders that in turn would allow him to solve problems facing the UK deployment. Through sheer force of character and experience, he was able to create spare capacity in the UN and other nations' transport assets to support the UK supply chain. As his reputation grew, he found himself in meetings with the UN Chiefs of Supply and Transport for South Sudan, where he offered advice on how to optimise the use of air assets.

The logistics of Operation Trenton include replacing the 400 personnel every six months. Two years in and the RE-led task force is making great progress, but its operation is only to help sustain the UN operation. There is a much larger logistics challenge in for the UN: how to bring peace and prosperity to a country where six million people live on the edge of starvation.

**L**ogistics in the British Army never stops. You may be forgiven for thinking that the Army is not busy post-Afghanistan, but in truth there are over 20 live deployments around the world that all need supporting. You might have read in *Focus* last year – 'Dealing with Hurricane Irma', *Focus*, January 2018 – about Operation Ruman and defence's contribution to the recovery of the British Virgin Islands after the storm.

Less glamorous and logistically more challenging is Operation Trenton, the provision of humanitarian aid support to the world's newest country, the Republic of South Sudan in sub-Saharan Africa.

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